

JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),
BUILDING NO. 4
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-D

HABS
PA
51-PHILA,
695D-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

HABS
PA
51-PHILA,
695D-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), BUILDING 4
HABS No. PA-5383-D

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Use:

Vacant.

Significance:

Building 4 is significant as an addition to the original building that housed the Brussel Carpet Mill division of the Dobson brothers textile operations. The construction and subsequent expansion of this building document the Dobsons' continued prosperity after the Civil War. The architectural continuity established by the use of similar materials, forms and construction in this building and the others in the complex are evidence of the Dobsons' desire to present a unified, monumental appearance.

PART 1. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

Date(s) of Erection:

1872. Altered 1880, mid-20th century. Building 4 first appears on the 1873 Hexamer Survey as an extension of Building 1.

Architect:

Unknown.

Original and Subsequent Owner:

See Chain of Title.

Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:

Unknown.

Original Plans and Construction:

Building 4, rectangular in shape, is the result of a series of additions to the now demolished Building 1 (Brussels Carpet Mill). Building 4, as originally built, was approximately 55' by 114', two stories in height (approximately 12' floor to ceiling height per floor) and of stone with a tin roof. The window opening fenestration was regular with segmental brick arches with granite keystones. A corner stair occupied the western corner of the building and a smoke stack was located along its western interior wall. Building 4, originally Building 3 to the south and Building 4 to the north, is shown on the 1873 Hexamer Survey with Building 3, housing a boiler room, a drying room and wool picker room. Building 4 housed a machine repair shop and wool washing machine on the first floor and a wool sorting room on the second.

Alterations and Additions:

Circa 1880, an additional three stories were added to the original structure making it five stories in height. Another stair was added along the western wall of the building. The new stories matched the materials, fenestration and detailing of the original building and unlike other buildings in the complex, was distinguished by a corbeled brick cornice. During the twentieth century, the majority of the original sash was replaced with metal industrial sash. The south elevation and south section of the west elevation were stuccoed and industrial sash inserted following the demolition of the original Building 1. In 1880, Building 5 (originally Building 17) was added to the northern end of Building 4. The buildings were

interconnected via doors in the common wall on each level. After the expansion of the building to five stories, it was used for drawing, spinning and trashing facilities on the fourth floor and warp dressing and winding facilities on the fifth, with sections used for drawing, spinning, twisting, warp dressing and winding. In the early twentieth century, Building 3 was added to the east as the new boiler room.

B. Historical Context

All of the functions that this building housed served the looms in the Brussel Carpet Mill that was located in the original Building 1. This second phase of expansion of the Dobsons' mill, with Building 1 and its additions, accommodated a different line of production. The end of the Civil War and the availability of cotton had diminished the need for woolen products. The ability to power the mill with steam allowed for the location of this complex in the center of the site away from the mill race. The intactness and interrelationship of Buildings 3, 4, and 5 is essential in communicating the incremental process by which the mill expanded during its period of operation.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

Architectural Character:

Building 4's stone construction, form, and fenestration are characteristic of the mill and reflect the Dobsons' desire for a unified appearance to their complex.

Condition of Fabric:

The masonry, timber and steel framing of the building are basically sound. However, the exterior rubble masonry's pointing is severely eroded and the timber framing has decayed in select areas. The replacement steel industrial sash is deteriorated from long term neglect and water damage. The original wood framing of the building was reinforced with steel in the second quarter of the 20th century.

B. Description of Exterior

Overall Dimensions:

First floor: 112.8'x54.5'

Foundations:

Rubblestone.

Walls:

Randomly laid rubble relieved by brick arches and corbeled brick and terra cotta parapet, stuccoed on south elevation and south section of west elevation. Backfill from the mid-twentieth century partially obscures the first floor of the east elevation which has non-original fire escapes. Round metal brackets, designating steel tie rods, are exposed on the east and west elevations.

Structural System, Framing:

Masonry and heavy timber framing reinforced with steel. The whole supported on non-original steel post structural system.

Porches, Stoops, Balconies, Bulkhead:

Concrete platform at west entry, concrete and schist loading dock to east.

Chimneys:

None.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

East elevation: cross-braced entrance door with steel lintel (later alterations inserted between two original window openings). West elevation: central register of stacked loading doors with arched brick lintels, original window opening converted to door.

Windows/Shutters:

The majority of the original wood window sash have been replaced with industrial steel sash with concrete jambs which have reduced the dimensions of the original window openings. The majority of the original segmental brick arched lintels with keystones survive although in deteriorated condition. The openings on the southern elevation have been largely infilled.

Roof:

Low pitched gable with built-up asphalt with two raised wood monitors bearing skylights probably installed c.1920.

C. Description of Interior

Floor Plans:

Basement- N/A, building is constructed on grade. Ground Floor- Rectangular. Upper Floors- Utilitarian mill space divided into north and south rooms with wooden piers carrying ceiling beams with a later load bearing steel post structural system.

Stairways:

Third floor freestanding stair of recent origin.

Flooring:

Ground floor- earth and concrete. Upper floors- unfinished wood floors, second and third floor joists supported with steel I-beams.

Wall/Ceiling Finishes:

The walls are plastered to a smooth surface and painted throughout. The ceilings are exposed timber beam and plank with an exposed later steel reinforcing system. All elements are painted throughout the building.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:

No surviving original or historic interior doors.

Windows:

All windows are recessed in unornamented plaster reveals with wood plank sills.

Decorative Features and Trim:

N/A.

Hardware:

Original hardware, which is no longer extant, is presumed to have been utilitarian in character.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: See PA-5383-C for heating system, air conditioning is N/A, ventilation by window mounted fans, exhaust ducts or air conditional units.

Lighting: Modern and strip fluorescent, ceiling mounted, lighting.

Plumbing: Early 20th-century, ceiling mounted, sprinkler fire suppression system.

D. Site

General Setting and Orientation:

Building 4 is part of the central set of mill buildings, forming a "U", on the site. It is enclosed on the north by another structure but remains visible from the west, east and south.

Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context section.

Outbuildings:

N/A.